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ABSTRACT

The author focuses on the role of the teacher of the handicapped in the Federal Republic of Germany. Outlined are the main tasks of the special education teacher, the types of academic training in special education, the course and content of studies in special education, and educational trends in German special education. (SBH)

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Personnel Preparation: International Comparisons

Session Contribution
from West Germany

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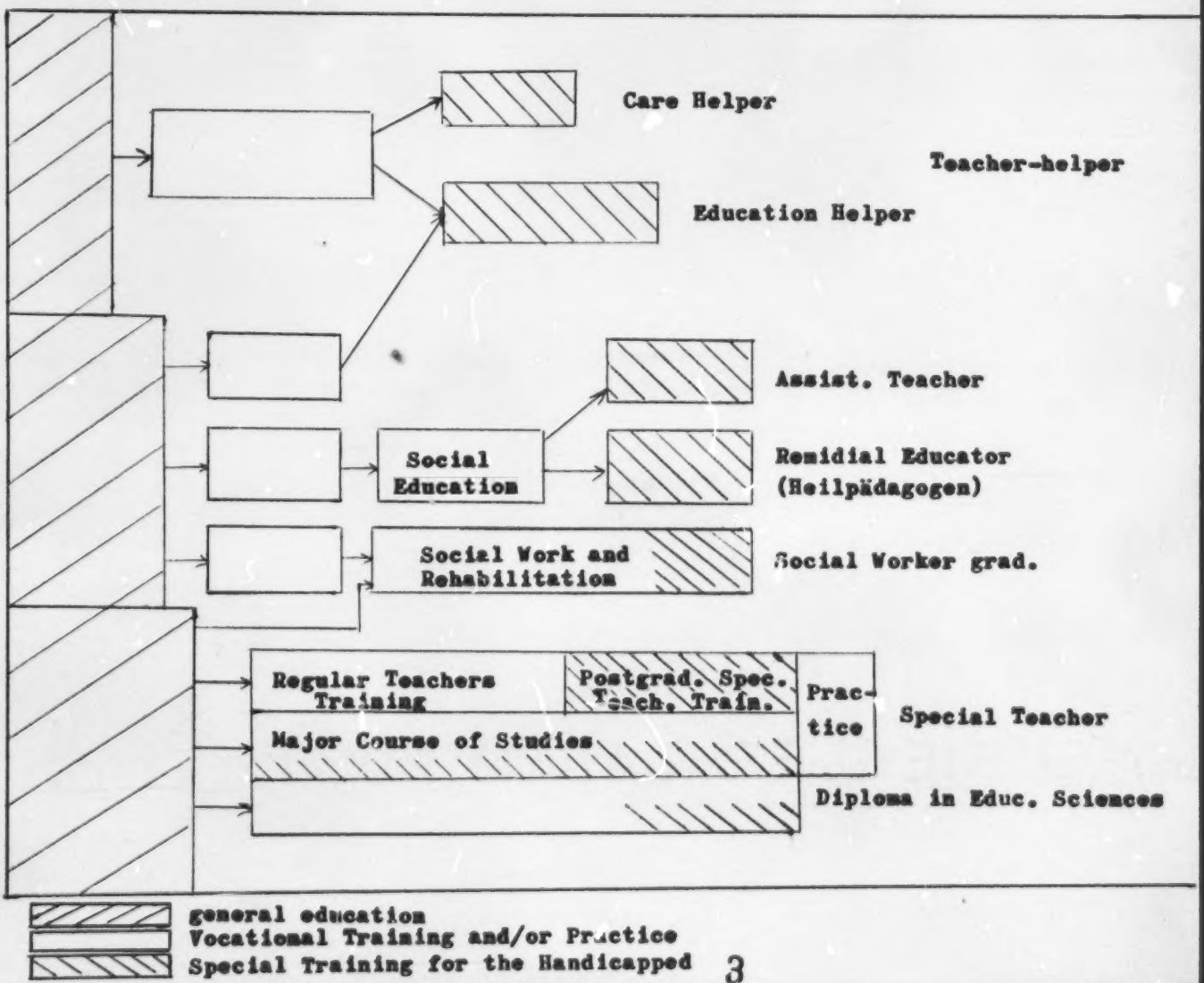
Personnel Preparation

Introductory remarks

In the Federal Republic of Germany there is no uniform system of education for educational personnel who work with handicapped children and adolescents. Each state has its own. In the course of mutual agreements they have become extremely similar to each other and coincide in their basic features. In the special schools and other institutions for the handicapped (e.g. homes) various personnel groups are employed. They differ in respect to functions and level of education, as is evident in Table 1.



This chart shows only those occupations that have an educational orientation. We did not include here other rehabilitation occupations such as psychologist, physician, speech therapist, physical therapist or occupational therapist.

Personnel in special education can be divided into three categories, mainly according to the level of education:

0.1 Helpers for the handicapped (teacher-helper): are employed mainly in institutions and hospitals in the care of the severely (mentally) retarded, which involves for the most part general physical care.

0.2 Educators for the handicapped (social-educator, curative or healing-educator): have generally absolved a basic course of studies in social education that is more practice-oriented. Their chief tasks lie in the realms of early stimulation programs, kindergarten, homes, hospitals, workshops and adult education. They work with groups or with single individuals. They also take on assisting functions in the special education schools.

0.3 Teachers for the handicapped (special-education teachers): are specially trained teachers who on behalf of the state are responsible for conducting school instruction according to the state guidelines. Every class in a special school has a special-ed. teacher in charge of it. These schools also employ non-teachers who exercise a supportive function.

In the following I would like to concentrate on this group.

Not long ago there was a great lack of teachers trained in special education. More than half of the teachers working in the special schools were normal elementary

school teachers. In the meantime so many teachers have been trained that we have a surplus in some special areas.

1. The main tasks of the special-education teacher

It is difficult to give a general description of these tasks because every type of special school places emphasis on relatively different tasks. Our special-ed. teachers are trained with an emphasis in one or another major area, for instance, in the education of mentally retarded or physically-handicapped or speech-handicapped children, etc. As a rule, however, the children are multiply-handicapped, so a certain variance in task determination results.

In former times the main tasks of the special educator were strictly limited to school and lessons. Today they have broadened. Worth particular mention are tho following:

1.1. Teaching, the imparting of knowledge and skills, is still the most important task of the teacher. Implied in this also is the so-called "educative-teaching" element, the development of personality in the group.

1.2. Assessment of the handicapped child, the educational diagnosis, is a prerequisite for adequate individual stimulation.

1.3. Special therapy within the school, such as Behavior Therapy, Speech Therapy, Play Therapy, is an additional but subordinated task of the teacher, usually in cooperation with specialists.

1.4. Parent advisement is growing steadily in importance. Many special educators feel the need to learn more about methods for working with and advising parents. Generally, our special schools do not have a social worker on their staffs.

1.5. Cooperation with specialists and institutions outside

of the school; with psychologists, physicians, therapists, Office of Social Welfare, clinics, hospitals employment agencies etc.

New areas of activity can be added to the list:

1.6. The educational early stimulation program, in which special educators, along with other specialists, are involved (home visits, home training, parent advisement, coordination of the complementary early interventions).

1.7. Supportive measures for children with learning difficulties in regular schools. In Germany several projects are being carried out at the present time in which the assignment of special educators to normal schools as a preventive measure is being tested.

2. The types of academic training in special education:

Studies in special education are offered at 15 universities in our country, either as post-graduate or as a major course of studies.

2.1. Post-graduate study has a longer tradition (in Munich since 1922). Entrance requirement is the successful completion of the teacher's examination in elementary education. If this kind of teacher had already been employed in the school system, he was released from his duties for one, later two years at full salary paid by the state. The state can or could determine the qualifying entrance requirements of this program. Only the better qualified teachers were admitted. In the meantime there are so many special-ed. teachers that the state no longer has to finance their post-graduate studies with paid "vacation".

2.2. Major course of studies: In the last few years it has become possible to become a special-ed. teacher in a direct, 4-year (minimum) course of studies. This alternative is in great demand. In Köln (Cologne) and Dortmund, for instance, there are altogether 4680 students at the present time. Because of the great number of applicants the admission had to be limited (numerus clausus). The decisive criterium was the average grade in the secondary school certificate. Other admission criteria, such as vocational test results, were not used.

3. Course and Content of Studies

3.1. Course of Studies: In the following I shall be referring to the direct course of studies in special education. In most of the states in our Federal Republic it is divided into two phases:

Phase 1: academic studies and practica (at least four years, then the first examination)

Phase 2: Practical training in a special school (1 1/2 - 3 years, then the second examination). The teacher-candidates are paid by the state during this time.

In two states in the German Federal Republic a one-phase training model is being tested at the present time. It includes one year of practical training and takes 5 years altogether.

3.2. As far as content of studies is concerned, I am referring to the first phase of the two-phase model. This includes three areas of study:

3.2.1. Basic studies in elementary education which are required of teachers for the regular primary schools; that is, general principles of education, psychology, sociology and so on.

3.2.2. Theory and method courses in a particular subject that are likewise required of regular teachers,

mathematics and the corresponding didactic method, geography and the corresponding teaching method, etc.

3.2.3. Studies in special education with an emphasis on one type of handicap and secondary emphasis on related special ed. subjects (Propädeutika); for instance, Learning difficulty (slight mental deficiency) plus behavior disorders plus therapeutic speech education.

The total weight of these three areas of study can be seen in a relation of 1 : 1 : 2.

The content of courses in special education are mainly:

1. Special education: special learning processes and learning conditions that accompany a particular handicap, educative goals, possibilities of compensation, institutions.

2. Special subject-method: Methods of teaching specific to the kind of handicap, curriculum (content, objectives), and special methods.

3. Special psychology: diagnostic procedures, retarded behavior, learning psychology, social psychology, treatment methods.

4. Basic principles of medicine: child and adolescent psychiatry, pediatrics, orthopedics, speech therapy.

5. Basic principles of sociology: social conditions and processes, retardation as deviating behavior.

Before and during this theoretical phase of studies several practica have to be performed.

1. Pre-practicum (social practicum) as personal evaluation of one's suitability for this profession (several weeks).

2. During the semester visits and practice-teaching one-half a day per week in a special school under supervision.
3. In the semester breaks practical work in the special schools for several weeks.

Very close cooperation between the university departments and the schools is desired but not always possible. The relationship between theory and practice has become increasingly strained. Apparently, the scientific development in the last few years made rapid progress and introduces innovations, the practicality of which has still to be investigated in the schools. Many experienced practicians, however, are very sceptical and view many scientific developments, and above all the terminology and discussion of them, as alienating. The students show an increasing desire for more practical orientation in their studies. This need seems to be a strange contradiction of their actual experiences, which they gain in the schools. They obviously do not find what they expect and wish in their practical work. <u>During</u> their training they judge the school-reality as either not special enough or backwards; <u>afterwards</u>, when they take over full responsibility in the classroom, it seems hard, unchangeable, disillusioning.

We believe that this phenonenom is of profound importance and that the reasons for it can be found in the increasing alienation from reality which is a result of an extremely intellectualized, deductively and programmatically oriented education. One can observe more and more subject-regression, which in spite of all the new methods makes the young student feel insecure and afraid of his tasks and of the children. This general dilemma can be solved post factum only if the subjectivity (individuality) of the student is taken more seriously during his training, especially by working in small groups, and by extending the length of time a teacher-candidate

has the securing help his mentor offers him to become acquainted with the total reality, the whole sober reality, and the necessity of finding meaning in all of the insufficiencies he meets.

4. It is generally very difficult to make statements about theoretical trends, because they are essentially dependent on one's personal area of activity. From my viewpoint I can report:

4.1. The socio-critical approach no longer has general priority. The students regard society as far less changeable than they would like. The goal of social integration is still regarded as worth striving for, but the possibilities for accomplishing this are assessed more soberly (realistically).

4.2. More interest is being given to the bio-genetic approach, which had been put on the back shelf for some time. For instance, organic causes for some behavior disorders have been given more attention lately, which demand an interactional and multiple-cause orientation in our pedagogic approach.

4.3. In the realm of psychology the behavior modification approach no longer rules. Approaches based on cognition psychology (Piaget) and developmental theory in combination with communication theory are reviving, as well as analytical psychology approaches.

4.4. In respect to curriculum, there seems to be a turning away from the strict product-oriented planning of educative goals. Open curricular systems are becoming more popular.

4.5. In special education, which until now has been too isolated from its related sciences, there are efforts to establish a stronger integration. For instance, the ties to general education are being underlined more than before, which is also connected with the fact that activities in special education

are finding their way into the normal school field under the influence of socio-integrating tendencies.

4.6. A new field of emphasis is the early stimulation program. Educative activities, in cooperation with other disciplines, are being directed more and more into the early phases of development of handicapped children and therefore involve more parent-advisement.

5. Concluding remarks

The training of special education teachers has developed enormously in recent years. Nevertheless, this expansion has also led to a recognition of the limits of its importance: a society that really wants to integrate its handicapped members and normalize their lives as far as possible needs not only superspecialists but also semi-professionals in all areas of common life. An international exchange of thoughts and the exchange of teachers and students would be a very welcome means of getting acquainted with other attitudes and trends.